

SUMMARY OF INFORMATION
ON THE

**MONADNOCK
BUILDING**

53 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

April 30, 1970

MONADNOCK BUILDING
53 West Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, Illinois

Date of Construction: 1889-1891

Architects: Daniel Burnham and John Wellborn Root

Landmark Site: (Legal description of property) Lots 5, 6, 7, and 12 in Wright's Subdivision of Block 122 in School Section Addition to Chicago in Section 16, Township 39 North, Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian.

Historic Summary of Site and Building: The first discussion of plans for the Monadnock Building appeared in a series of letters between Peter and Shepherd Brooks of Boston and Owen F. Aldis, manager of their midwestern properties, during the first half of 1885. The initial proposal to buy the land was made by the Brooks brothers in September, 1885, but the decision to build seems to have been put off until 1888. Burnham and Root completed the working drawings by the summer of the following year. From 1888 until 1966, the property continued in the hands of the Aldis family and the Brooks estate. Aldis and Company managed the building until October, 1966, when Sudler and Company took it over.

The legal and equitable title to the land and building is held in a land trust, No. 35450, with the LaSalle National Bank as trustee. The trust agreement is dated July 26, 1966. The sole beneficiary of this trust is a limited partnership composed of two general partners and five limited partners.

Construction began on the Monadnock Building in 1889. It was originally designed as two office buildings, called the Monadnock and Kearsarge, although today the two are simply called the Monadnock Building. Each was then equipped with its own heating plant, elevator bank, stairways and plumbing.

In 1893, Holabird and Roche were commissioned to design an addition, to be located to the south and attached to the Monadnock Building. Like the north half, it was designed as two buildings, called the Katahdin and the Wachusett. All four names are after mountains in New England. The four buildings together are today sometimes referred to as the "Monadnock Block." For many years the complex was thought to be the largest office structure in the world. (10)* The addition extends south to Van Buren Street. It more than doubled the amount of office space. But unlike its masonry neighbor, the south section is of steel frame construction (containing vertical steel in its outer walls), and the fenestration differs sufficiently to mark it off clearly from the northern half.

A \$125,000 remodeling of the building in 1938 was planned by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill; it was one of the first and largest such jobs in the office building field. Smaller, poorly lighted offices were remodeled to attract new tenants. The major changes were: restyling the main entrance; remodeling of the entrance foyer and connecting shops; modernization of the twelfth floors; modernization of all other public space on all floors, including corridors, washrooms, elevator stalls, etc.; progression of suite modernization to all floors as demand warrants. (30)

Carl Condit, historian of building technology, noted in 1964 that "the Monadnock was unquestionably the Brooks brothers' most profitable investment; the building was recently renovated and its offices are fully occupied today, as they have been throughout its history." (7) In addition, usage has changed to accommodate changing needs. Fewer tenants now occupy larger office spaces.

*Refer to bibliography

Physical Description: The Monadnock is sixteen stories high with a basement and an attic. The building reaches an overall height of 215 feet and in width is very narrow; dimensions of approximately 70 feet by 200 feet allow all offices to have windows facing a street. Projecting bay windows increase the sunlit space in the offices as well as the floor area.

Burnham and Root's Monadnock Building is particularly noteworthy for being the highest and heaviest masonry wall-bearing structure in Chicago and perhaps anywhere. (23) Cast-iron columns and wrought-iron beams support part of the weight of the floors, but the rest of the load is carried by the walls, which are six feet thick at the base and taper as they rise. Building any higher with traditional masonry construction methods was just not feasible. In fact, the Monadnock Building is said to be the last skyscraper of solid masonry construction. (25)

Underground, floating raft foundations and spread footings that extend eleven feet beyond the building into the surrounding streets support the structure. Caissons were added under the west wall in 1940, when a subway tunnel was dug under Dearborn Street. The building was set up eight inches to allow for settling; it had uniformly settled slightly more than twenty inches as of 1936. (7) The Monadnock and William LeBaron Jenney's Manhattan Building, designed and built simultaneously, share the distinction of being the first American buildings constructed with a complete system of portal windbracing. This is a method of bracing an iron frame to insure rigidity; it was first used in the portal frames of truss bridges. (16)

The building's extreme simplicity of design sets the Monadnock apart from its contemporaries. The poet, Harriet Monroe, John Root's sister-in-law and biographer, described how the facade took its form:

"Mr. Aldis, who controlled the investment, kept urging upon his architects simplicity, rejecting one or two of Root's sketches as too ornate. During Root's absence of a fortnight at the seashore, Mr. Burnham ordered from one of the draughtsmen a design of a straight-up-and-down, uncompromising, unornamented facade. When Root returned, he was indignant at first over this project of a brick box. Gradually, however, he threw himself into the spirit of the thing, and one day he told Mr. Aldis that the heavy sloping lines of an Egyptian pylon had gotten into his mind as the basis of this design, and that he would 'throw the thing up without a single ornament.' At last, with a gesture whose pretense of disgust concealed a shy experimental interest, he threw on the drawing-table of Mr. Dutton, then foreman of the office, 'a design,' says this gentleman, 'shaped something like a capital I—a perfectly plain building, curving outward at the base and cornice.' This was the germ of the final design." (19)

Reynier Banham, who wrote the introduction to Miss Monroe's book, points out that the Brooks correspondence shows the Monadnock was a financier's triumph, as well as the architects', and that the responsibility for its final form is to be shared by both. (19)

Significance of Building to Chicago: The Monadnock Building is unique in that it marks the end of a traditional concept of building construction and the beginning of a new one. As the last masonry wall-bearing skyscraper, the building represented the culmination of a long, slow evolution of masonry structures, yet its simple, subtly-designed, unornamented brick exterior heralded a new architectural aesthetic. In 1890, Root, in speaking of modern buildings, said that, "to lavish upon them profusion of delicate ornament is worse than useless....Rather should they by their mass and proportion convey in some large elemental sense an idea of the great stable conserving forces of modern civilization." (9) A description by Miss Monroe applies Root's analysis of modern buildings directly to the Monadnock. "From the great outward sweep at the base, the eye rises without weariness to the gentler slopes of the cornice and wins a sense of vastness, of dignity and repose." (19) Soaring massive walls and the omission of profuse ornament on the Monadnock create just this impression. Evident in this building is the inherent urge of the Chicago school toward refinement and purity of form. Even contemporary structures—such as the Brunswick Building, with its sloping, load-bearing walls—are directly influenced by the form of the Monadnock Building.

The building stands at the south end of Dearborn, a street that contains many of Chicago's most architecturally significant 19th and 20th century buildings. Starting at the north end, the following buildings trace the development of the skyscraper: Marina City, designed by Bertrand Goldberg; Chicago's Civic Center, C. F. Murphy Associates; the Marquette Building, Holabird and Roche; the Federal Center, Mies van der Rohe; the Fisher Building, D. H. Burnham and Company; the Old Colony Building, Holabird and Roche; the Manhattan Building, William LeBaron Jenney; and, the Monadnock Block.

The Monadnock is one of over 250 structures Burnham and Root designed during their partnership of eighteen years. The majority were in Chicago. Of twenty-seven that originally stood in the Loop, only two in addition to the Monadnock remain: the Commerce, near LaSalle and Jackson and the Rookery, 209 South LaSalle Street (14)

The Monadnock has often been singled out for praise. Montgomery Schuyler, generally regarded as the most astute architectural critic of his day, has said, "It impresses many, including the present writer, as precisely the most effective and successful commercial structure to which the elevator has literally 'given rise.'" (25) Vincent Scully, noted architectural historian, calls the Monadnock "the most splendid office building to rise in Chicago during the early days." (26)

Although John Wellborn Root died in 1891, at age 41, (before the Monadnock Building was completed) he stands with Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright as one of the great designers and philosophers of the Chicago school. Both men admired and respected him. Louis Sullivan, writing of himself in the third person in his autobiography, said, "Louis saw the man of power, recognized him, had faith in him, and took joy in him as a prospective and real stimulant in rivalry as a mind with which it would be well worth while to clash wits in the promotion of an essentially common cause...John Root had it in him to be great...Louis missed him sadly." (2B) Frank Lloyd Wright recognized him as a man of genius. (11) Root's genius is also recognized today. John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown, in their history of architecture in the United States, wrote of the evocative power of the American dream of a richer and happier life, adding, "Not many architects except Louis Sullivan, John W. Root and Frank Lloyd Wright stand as clear-cut examples of the power of the dream." (5)

The Monadnock Building was designated as an architectural landmark having special merit by the former Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks:

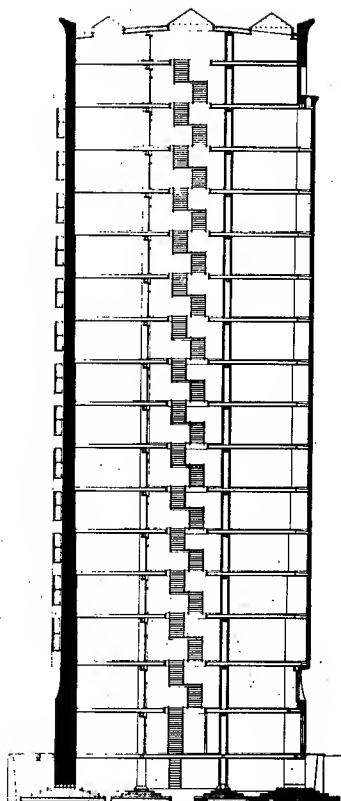
"In recognition of its original design and historical interest as the highest wall-bearing structure in Chicago. Restrained use of brick, soaring massive walls, omission of ornamental forms, unite in a building simple, yet majestic."

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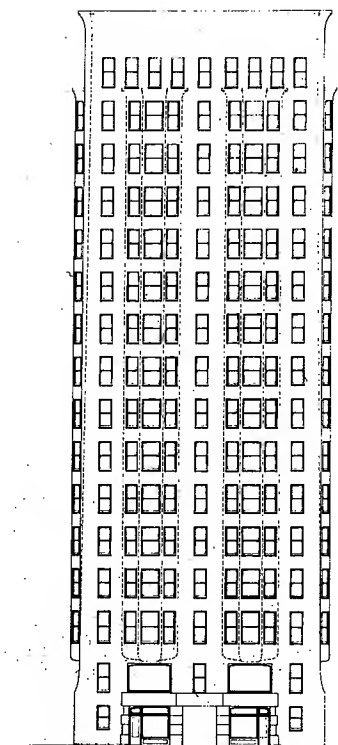
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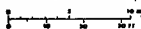


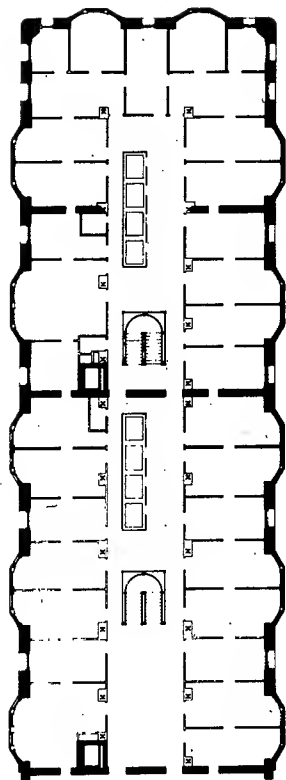
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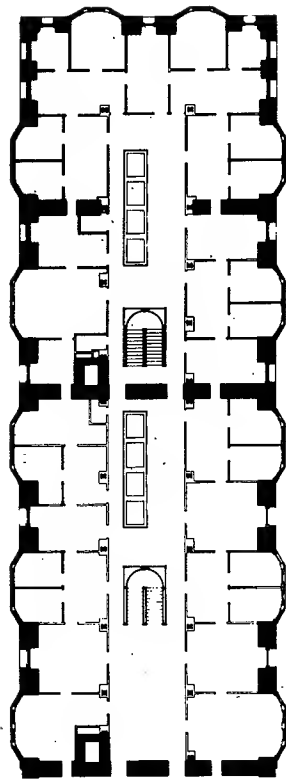
CHICAGO 1891

ARCHITECTEN BURNHAM & ROOT





1. OG ERIEGSCROSS



2. OG ERIEGSCROSS

MONADNOCK BLOCK CHICAGO 1891 ARCHITEKTEN BURNHAM & ROOT

**CHRONOLOGY OF ACTION TAKEN BY THE COMMISSION ON
CHICAGO HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARKS ON
THE MONADNOCK BUILDING, 53 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD,
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**

JANUARY 22, 1969 — A meeting was held by the Advisory Committee to the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, in which the Committee passed a motion recommending that sixteen buildings, including the Monadnock Building, be officially designated as "Chicago Landmarks."

JANUARY 28, 1969 — A second meeting of the Advisory Committee was held, in which specific explanations for selection of the sixteen buildings were decided. The committee members concluded that the commemorative citation awarded to the Monadnock Building by the predecessor Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks offers a valid explanation of the building's architectural merit. This was outlined in a letter from Carl Condit, Chairman, Advisory Committee, directed to Samuel Lichtmann, Commission Chairman.

FEBRUARY 11, 1969 — A meeting of the Commission was held, and copies of Mr. Condit's letter were submitted to the members of the Commission.

MARCH 26, 1970 — A meeting of the Commission was held, and copies of a preliminary summary of the documentation on the Monadnock Building, prepared by the Commission staff, were submitted to the Commission members. At this Commission meeting, a motion was passed which stated that *"The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks shall propose the designation of the Monadnock Building as an architectural landmark."*

APRIL 7, 1969 — A letter was sent by Samuel Lichtmann to Lewis W. Hill, Commissioner of Development and Planning, City of Chicago, advising that the Commission had reached a preliminary conclusion that the Monadnock Building would be proposed for designation as an architectural landmark. In accord with Chapter 21-64(c) of the Municipal Code of Chicago, Mr. Hill was asked to submit his recommendations regarding the proposal.

JULY 16, 1969 — Mr. Hill's report, containing the recommendation that the Monadnock Building be designated as a "Chicago Landmark," was submitted to the members of the Commission at a regular meeting on this date. A motion was passed unanimously which stated: *"Regarding the Monadnock Building, the Commission (shall) proceed with the next step in the designation procedure as set forth in Section 21-64(d) of the Municipal Code of Chicago, that is, contact the owner or owners of the property and outline the reasons and effects of its proposed designation and, if possible, secure the owner's written consent for submittal of said proposal for designation to the City Council of Chicago."*

OCTOBER 14, 1969 — A letter concerning ownership of the Monadnock Building was sent by Samuel Lichtmann to Frank G. Price, President, LaSalle National Bank, regarding the LaSalle National Bank Trust No. 35450. The Commission requested the following:

1. A certified copy of the trust agreement for Trust No. 35450, particularly showing the names of beneficiaries, or
2. A certified letter of direction and authorization by the beneficiaries to the bank.
3. Other Information.

JANUARY 17, 1970 — A letter, dated January 16, 1970, was received by the Commission from the law firm of Wilson & McIlvaine, stating that "The owners of the Monadnock Building at 53 West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois, have reviewed your letter of October 14, 1969, and relevant portions of the municipal code. After careful consideration they have asked us to inform you that they will not give their consent to the proposed designation."

MARCH 18, 1970 — At a regular meeting of the Commission, it was determined that, in accord with Section 21-64(3) of the Municipal Code of Chicago, a public hearing on the proposed designation of the building as a "Chicago Landmark" would be held in the latter part of April, 1970. Subsequent to this, the date of April 30, 1970, was set.

APRIL 3, 1970 — A notice of the public hearing was sent to:
LaSalle National Bank, as trustee under Trust 35450
Kenneth F. Montgomery and Carroll H. Sudler, general partners in the limited partnership that is the beneficiary of the trust
New York Life Insurance Company, mortgagor

APRIL 9, 16, 23, 1970 — An official notice of the public hearing appeared in the Five Star Edition of the *Chicago Today* newspaper.

APRIL 13, 1970 — A sign was posted at the building, notifying the public of the hearing.

APRIL 15, 1970 — At a regular meeting of the Commission, revised summaries of the documentation on the Monadnock Building were submitted to the members of the Commission.

APRIL 30, 1970 — A public hearing on the proposed designation of the Monadnock Building as a "Chicago Landmark" was to be convened at 10:00 A.M. in the City Council Chamber of City Hall, 121 North La Salle Street, Chicago, Illinois.



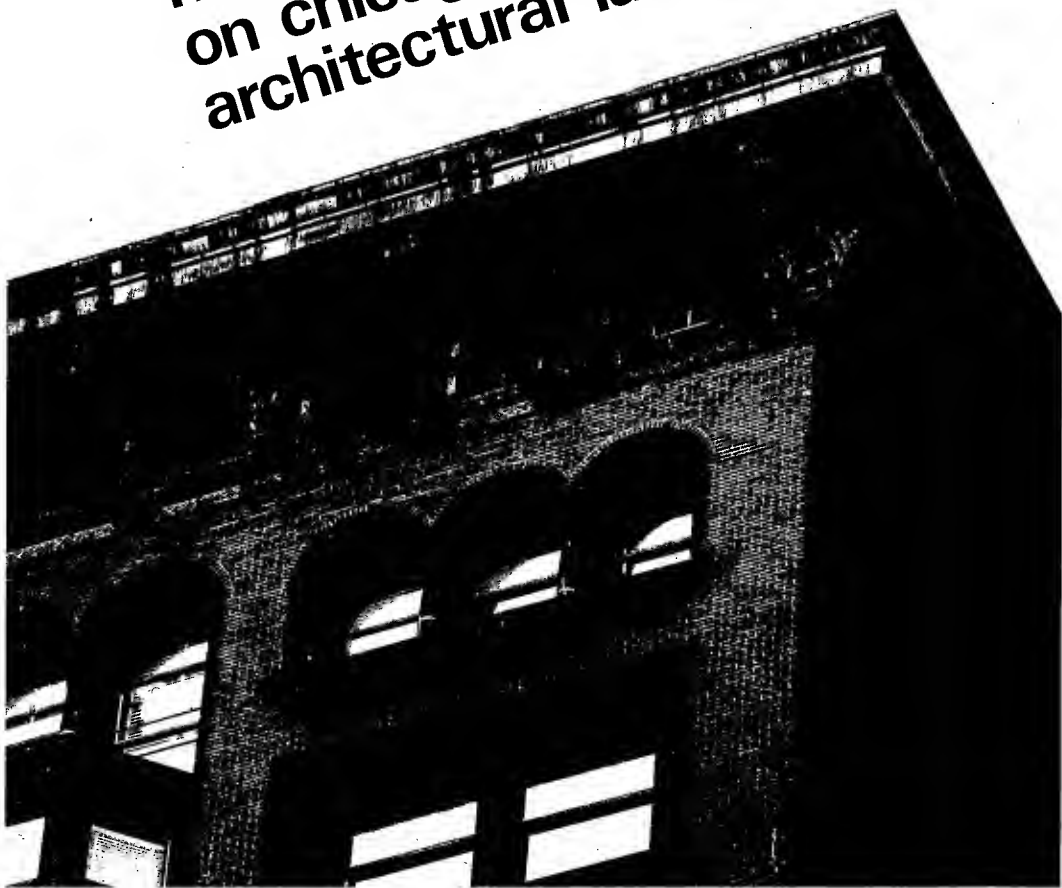
CITY OF CHICAGO
RICHARD J. DALEY, Mayor

COMMISSION ON CHICAGO HISTORICAL
AND ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARKS

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BARNET HODES, Vice-Chairman
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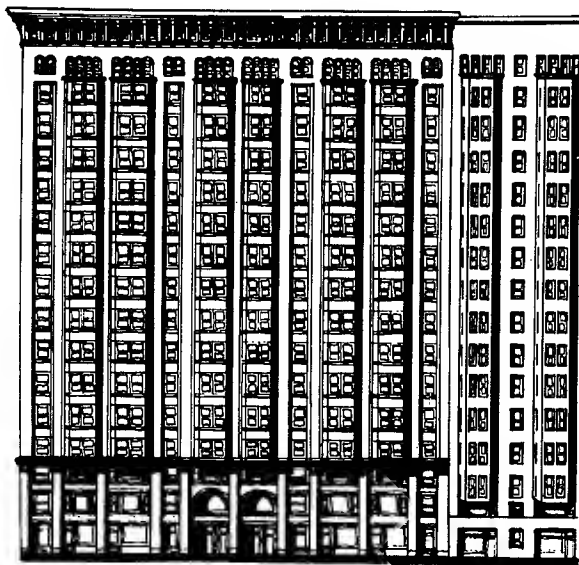
a summary of information on
the south half of the
MONADNOCK BLOCK
november 1972 commission
on chicago historical and
architectural landmarks



the south half of the Monadnock Block
a summary of information
The Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks
November 1972

This *Summary of Information* is a synopsis of various research materials related to *the south half of the Monadnock Block*, prepared for the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks by its staff.

the south half of the MONADNOCK BLOCK



Northwest corner of Van Buren and Dearborn Streets Chicago, Illinois

architects
date

Holabird & Roche
1893

Landmark Site:

Lots 13, 18, 19 and 24 in Wright's Subdivision
of Block 122 in School Section Addition to
Chicago in Section 16, Township 39 North,
Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian.

the architects

William Holabird, born in New York state in September of 1854, and Martin Roche, born in Cleveland in August of 1855, began their earliest architectural training in the Chicago office of William LeBaron Jenney. In 1881 they formed a three-man partnership with O.C. Simmonds, but changed the name to include only Holabird and Roche after Simmonds left to establish his own firm in 1883.

According to J. William Rudd, who compiled a bibliography of the firm:

Holabird and Roche soon found a place in the mainstream of the Chicago movement and by the end of the 1880's they were among the acknowledged leaders of the school. With such buildings as the Tacoma (1889), the Marquette (1895), the Cable (1899), the McClurg (1900) and the Republic (1905), they translated the avant-garde ideas of Chicago architecture into successful structures through [out] the nineties and into the twentieth century.

One of the city's most prolific offices, the firm enjoyed an unusually successful practice for forty-five years. William Holabird was the more outgoing and worked as engineer and business partner. Martin Roche served as chief designer, although design responsibilities were often shared between the two until the number of their commissions forced the formation of a larger staff.

By the second decade of the twentieth century their pioneering spirit shifted toward the Beaux-Arts design so popular throughout the nation following the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. While the buildings executed during this period lacked the firm's initial innovative style, they were nevertheless competent variations of the classical order.

To date, little has been written about the firm. Of those early reviews that do exist, most deal with the eclectic designs rather than the extremely original work produced in the late 80s, the 90s and the earliest years of the twentieth century.

This attitude is slowly changing, and rightly so. As historian Carl Condit states:

In the long period of their practice, in the number and excellence of their buildings, in the consistency and uniformity of their designs, William Holabird and Martin Roche most completely represented the purpose and the achievement of the mainstream of the Chicago school...

Holabird and Roche approached the problem of the commercial building in much the same objective, empirical, and businesslike way as Jenney did. Yet not only were they responsible for many structural and utilitarian innovations, but they also succeeded in developing the most

effective architectonic expression of steel framing up to Sullivan's Carson Pirie Scott Store. . .

...They discovered the simplest utilitarian and structural solutions to the problems of the big urban office block, and out of these solutions they developed a perfectly rational and standardized form adaptable with minor variations to the conditions imposed by the commercial structure in a crowded urban area. . .

The uniformity of their work is so striking that with little familiarity one can pick out their designs all over the Loop and adjacent blocks. Some critics have complained that, after the Marquette (1895), their buildings reveal a monotonous repetition. . .The work of Holabird and Roche is not sterile repetition; it represents detailed variations within the achievement of a stable form.

the building

The 1893 development of the south-half addition to the Monadnock Building completed the block bounded by Dearborn, Federal, Van Buren and Jackson.

According to the recollections of architect Edward Renwick:

When he (Owen Aldis, development agent) put up the Monadnock on Jackson Boulevard there was nothing on the south side of the street between State Street and the River but cheap one story shacks, mere hovels. Everyone thought Mr. Aldis was insane to build way out there on the ragged edge of the city. Later when he carried the building through to Van Buren Street they were sure he was.

Mr. Aldis represented the real estate interests of the Brooks Brothers of Boston, who also commissioned the Montauk, the Rookery and the Marquette. As manager of their Chicago properties, it was his insistence upon simplicity that fostered the straight-forward, no-nonsense design of the earlier Monadnock by Burnham and Root.

It was he, as well, who early saw the potential for development in this southern area of the Loop, which shortly thereafter gave rise to a series of early skyscrapers, including the Manhattan, Old Colony and Fisher Buildings, thus vindicating his decision.

The south half of the Monadnock, like the north, was originally conceived as one building made up of two separate parts. Kearsarge and Monadnock were the sections in the north, Katahdin and Wachusett the sections in the south. Each of the four units was in effect self-contained, operating its own elevators and mechanical equipment. But this division was only internal, not in any way reflected on the facade.

Between the halves, however, there is a distinct visual differentiation, and perhaps this is to be expected since they were constructed at different times by different architects employing different structural techniques.

Nevertheless, today both halves are serviced as one building. And together they are called simply the Monadnock Block.

Sited on property approximately 70x200 feet (the entire block occupies a parcel approximately 70x400 feet), the south half of the Monadnock is 17 stories high with one basement. These narrow site dimensions allowed all offices to be located on the perimeter of the building, facing the street and open to natural light.

The addition, like the original, rests upon a spread footing foundation with the exception of the east wall which was transferred to hardpan caissons during construction of the Dearborn Street subway in 1940.

While at ground level Burnham and Root's building is six feet thick, Holabird and Roche needed but the thickness of face brick and insulation to cover the supporting steel piers of their structure, thereby freeing wider spans for glass at the base.

Similar to the north half, the exterior of the addition is broken with projecting bays offering increased sunlight and floor area to the offices inside. A pattern is formed through the alternation of two sets of bay windows with a strip of windows slightly recessed in the flat wall plane.

This undulating facade was an early trademark of the Holabird and Roche firm, appearing in their first and one of their finest structures, the Tacoma Building (demolished in 1929). It was further refined here in the Monadnock and in the Pontiac building, also on Dearborn.

So for 15 stories the surface of the addition continues the rhythm established by the older building, with the most obvious deviations from the Burnham and Root treatment occurring in the two top-most stories.

In the south half the sixteenth story windows are separated by columns and capped with round arches resembling an arcade. The north half windows, in comparison, are severe rectangles cut boldly into the facade.

The south building is then topped with a huge cornice somewhat classical in detail. The brackets of this cornice divide the seventeenth floor windows and are of equal height to them. This conspicuous break between building and cornice is totally unlike the simple parapet of the first section of the Monadnock, where a gently outward-curving surface smoothly terminates that structure.

Although the south half addition is one office-story higher, this story corresponds directly with the attic and parapet next door. So with the exception of this final story, the floor levels are continuous along the facades of both buildings.

But the most notable difference in Holabird and Roche's addition is the use of a skeletal steel frame in place of the more traditional masonry construction of the older building.

The south half, while faced with brick and trimmed in terra cotta, reveals its underlying structure in the narrowness of the piers and the broad window openings. Contrast this to the broad piers and narrow openings necessitated by the masonry construction of the northern half.

Although no one has yet documented the reasons for the change in structural technique, it is easy to surmise why that happened. First, a skeleton frame opened the facade to larger glass areas. Second, skeletal construction afforded more rentable shop and office space. Third, a building employing a steel frame could be erected much more quickly therefore cutting down construction costs.

In 1938 the entire complex, north and south, was thoroughly remodeled by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. This was one of the first and largest jobs of its kind in the office building field.

Carl Condit noted in 1964 that:

...the Monadnock was unquestionably the Brooks Brothers' most profitable investment; the building was recently renovated and its offices are fully occupied today, as they have been throughout its history.

Standing back to back, the two halves present an unusual perspective for examining the development of the Chicago School. While just a few years apart in time of construction, the two are centuries apart in terms of structural technique.

A remarkably sophisticated treatment for the age-old principles of masonry building, the northern half is mature John Root, coming at the end of his tragically short career. Had he lived longer, this half might possibly have been suggestive of his approach to the design potentials of a new material, steel.

On the other hand, the south addition is in fact an early expression of steel frame construction. And it is the work of a relatively new firm, Holabird and Roche.

Thus, despite the marked differences at ground level and cornice line, the bulk of the two halves reflects the same rhythm with their undulation between flat plane and protruding bay. And despite their opposing structural systems, the building surfaces are handled in a manner at once similar yet consistent with their varying techniques.

While one reads steel and the other stone, together these two buildings complete the development of a city block in the best tradition of the Chicago School. This block is a long established element in the cityscape, a landmark to

the growth of the skyscraper in the internationally famous style of Chicago School architecture.

The Monadnock Block, both the north and south halves, is listed on the *National Register of Historic Places*.

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The south half of the Monadnock Block looking north from Van Buren.
Note the contrast in cornice lines between the addition and the original.

(Henry Dovilas, photographer)



75
MAX.

Amalgamated
Bank

View along Dearborn. The south half is clearly more articulated than the north, as evidenced in the subtle ornamentation carved in brick and terra cotta.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)



The upper stories showing the play between flat plane and projecting bays. Unlike the northern half, the addition incorporates an arcade at the sixteenth floor and a string of windows enclosed by brackets just under the cornice.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)

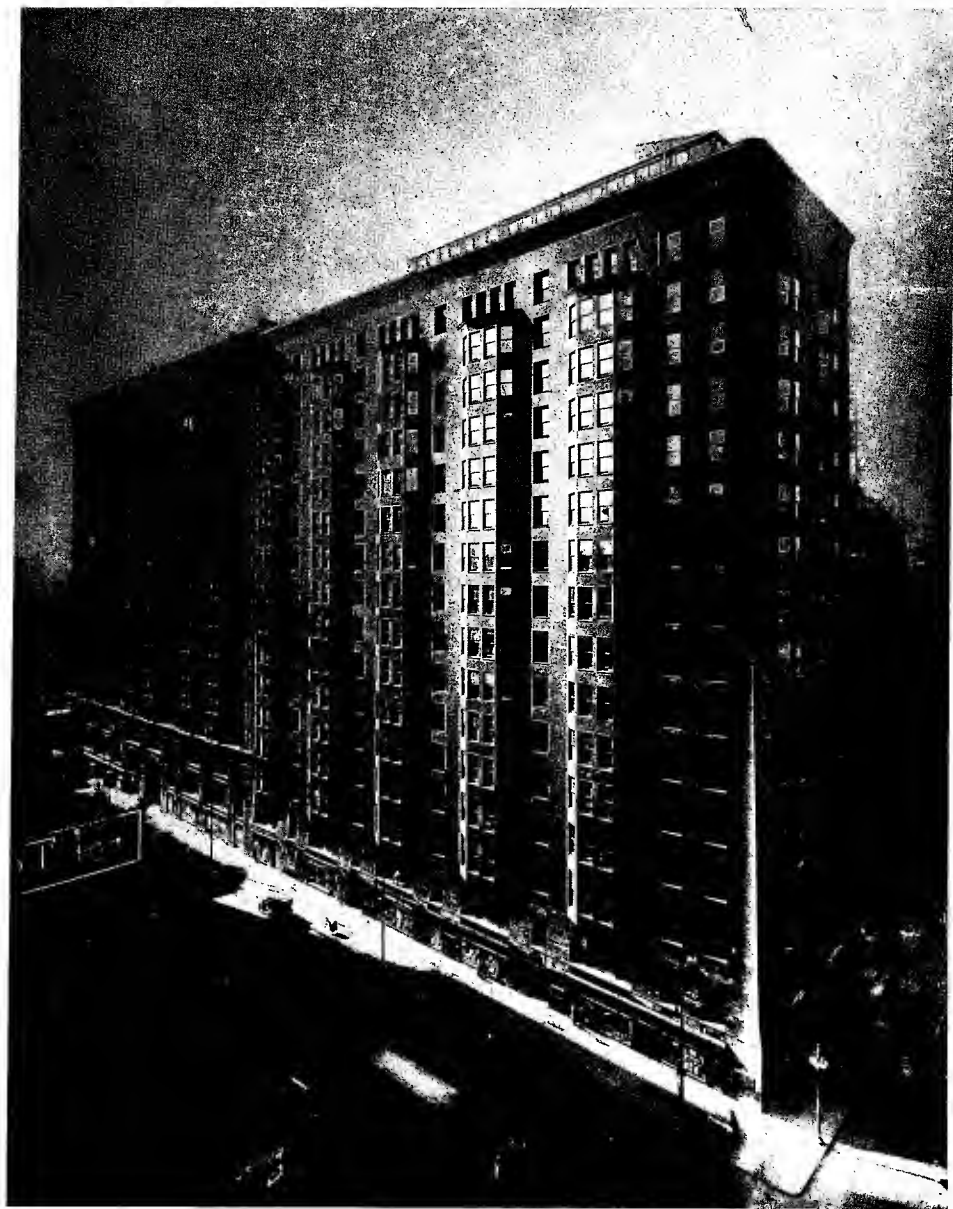


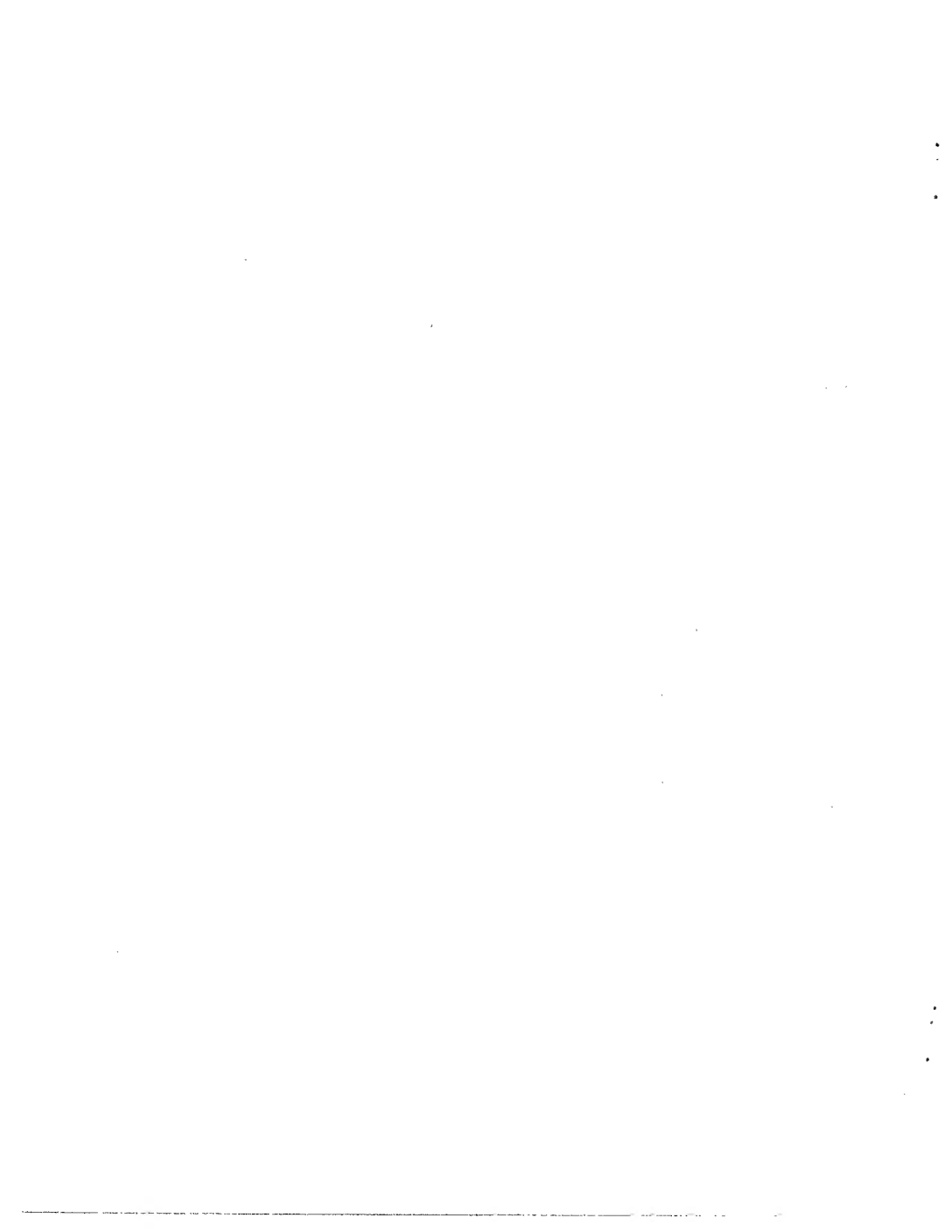
Detail of the arcade, the brackets and the cornice.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)



Elevation of the Dearborn facade illustrating the relation of the south half (left) to the north. Except at the base and cornice lines, the two sections appear to merge as a single building.







CITY OF CHICAGO
RICHARD J. DALEY, Mayor

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